COVERT NETWORK

Progressives, the International Rescue Committee, and the CIA

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After Vietnam, the IRC operated on a global scale. Over the last thirty-five years, the Committee has helped refugees in virtually every continent. Throughout the last decades of the Cold War, the organization devoted most of its resources to those global hot spots where superpower rivalry was at its most intense. In 1960, as Castro's Cuba turned to Communism, the Committee's leadership approached the CIA hierarchy for covert assistance in initiating a program for Cuban refugees. Twenty years later, the IRC effort for Afghan refugees in flight from the Soviet occupation of their country quickly grew to become the organization's largest program during that period.

With the end of the Cold War, the Committee has been able to pursue a more independent stance in relation to U.S. foreign policy. Yet when a confrontation arises, such as the Persian Gulf crisis, the IRC and the government still work closely together. The International Rescue Committee remains a most unusual refugee relief agency. The next section examines the Committee's evolution over the last decades of the Cold War and beyond, with emphasis on the organization's role during the Vietnam War.

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Into the Vietnam Quagmire

Vietnam was the acid test for Cold War politics in the United States. It also represented a watershed for the International Rescue Committee. In response to pressure from high officials within the Eisenhower administration, the Committee decided to expand beyond Europe and began organizing a series of programs in Southeast Asia. The United States had engaged in counterinsurgency warfare within the Third World for several years before Vietnam, but the IRC had declined to become involved. After Vietnam, the Committee would become a truly global organization, with the bulk of its resources being devoted to refugee programs within the less developed countries.

Yet Vietnam would also provide the Committee with an opportunity to expand the scope of its activities, and not only in terms of its geographic reach. The IRC helped to initiate the American Friends of Vietnam, which propagandized the American public on behalf of the U.S.-backed regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. This represented a very different type of operation from that usually undertaken by the Committee. Reflecting this underlying difference, the current chapter details the role of the Committee in South Vietnam as a refugee relief agency, while the following chapter explores the history of the AFVN and its successor, the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, as they attempted to sway U.S. public opinion.

The IRC initiated its refugee relief program in South Vietnam only months after the United States decided to displace the French as the dominant Western power in Southeast Asia. This complex sequence of events began to unfold in the summer of 1954 in the chaotic tumult of Saigon, as the French colonial army conceded defeat and prepared to withdraw. A Communist guerrilla army, the Viet Minh led by Ho Chi Minh, had spearheaded the nationalist struggle against the Japanese occupation from 1941

through 1945. At the end of World War II, the French attempt to restore their colonial rule over Vietnam was stymied by the fierce resistance of the Viet Minh. Soon, the United States began to provide extensive support to the French and to their dependent ally, Emperor Bao Dai. The long and bloody war finally came to an end when Viet Minh units surrounded the French outpost at Dien Bien Phu, and then, in May 1954, forced the outpost to surrender after months of intensive fighting.[1]

Two months after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, France signed an armistice at an international peace conference held in Geneva, Switzerland, that committed its forces to a phased withdrawal from Vietnam. The conference accords divided the country into two zones: North Vietnam under Communist rule and the South under Bao Dai. This division was intended to be temporary, with democratic elections scheduled throughout Vietnam by no later than July 1956, two years after the Geneva agreement.[2]

Thus, the situation was chaotic in the summer of 1954. As the French began to loosen their hold over their former colony, the United States decided to supplant them as the outside power overseeing Vietnamese affairs. Since the commitment was covert at first, the U.S. mission in South Vietnam consisted primarily of CIA personnel. Within months, Saigon went from an Agency backwater to a station with dozens of case officers on staff, operating under cover of the Saigon Military Mission (SMM), as well as the United States Operations Mission (USOM), the economic aid section of the American embassy staff.[3]

At the pinnacle of the operation stood Colonel Edward Lansdale, an expert in psychological warfare and the subject of an unflattering portrayal in Graham Greene's novel, *The Quiet American.* Lansdale confidently believed that the Communists could be stopped, but only if the South Vietnamese people could be convinced that the Saigon government ruled honestly and that it was diligently implementing an extensive program of land reform aimed at redistributing the vast holdings of the wealthy few. Thus, an effective counterinsurgency campaigned required more than the skillful application of military power. The United States would have to construct a government dedicated to social reform, and then persuade the Vietnamese people that this regime represented a viable alternative to the Communist insurgents.[4]

Bao Dai had been totally compromised by his willingness to coexist with French colonial rule, as well as by the blatant corruption that marked his rule, as organized criminal gangs were permitted to monopolize the illicit trades operating in Saigon and the other urban areas. U.S. officials understood that Bao Dai would have to cede power to a prominent Vietnamese who had not cooperated with French colonial rule, someone who also had a reputation for personal honesty and integrity. Ngo Dinh Diem was that alternative.

Diem, an austere, ascetic personality, had made his reputation as a competent administrator. In 1950, after the French had forced him into exile because of his outspoken opposition to the colonial regime, Diem went to live in several Western countries, including the United States, where he ardently promoted his "Third Way" as an effective alternative to French colonialism and the Communist insurgency.[5]

While in the United States, Diem met several prominent personalities, among them Cardinal Francis Spellman and Leo Cherne of the IRC. Diem also gained a sympathetic hearing from several influential progressives who were thoroughly disenchanted with the unimaginative and conservative policies being implemented by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and the Eisenhower administration. Following a visit to Saigon during a global tour in 1952, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas met Diem in this country and was impressed by his personal integrity. Douglas then introduced Diem to Senator John F. Kennedy, as well as to other influential congressional liberals, including Mike Mansfield, a Senate insider who would later be chosen majority leader.[6]

In the aftermath of Dien Bien Phu, the Eisenhower administration reluctantly turned to Diem, hoping to block a quick Communist victory throughout Vietnam. Dulles pressured the French, and the two powers then induced Bao Dai to appoint Diem as premier. Lansdale had already arrived in Saigon a month before Diem's return in July 1954, and soon the CIA was pouring agents into Saigon in a frenzied effort to bolster the new government. Dulles was anxious to retain South Vietnam as an ally, and Diem represented the only viable option. Nevertheless, the Eisenhower administration vacillated in its defense of Diem during the first months of his rule. The new premier was a mandarin, haughty and arrogant, with little of the popular touch. He was also a deeply religious Catholic, in a country where Catholics constituted only about 10 percent of the total South Vietnamese population. Furthermore, the Viet Minh insurgents enjoyed tremendous authority among the Vietnamese peasantry as the military force that had decisively defeated French colonial rule.[7]

As the French withdrew from Vietnam, they counseled the United States to accept a Viet Minh victory and to negotiate with them as nationalists who potentially could be won to a policy of global nonalignment, following the example already set by Tito in Yugoslavia. British military intelligence concluded that the situation was hopeless, informing a CIA officer that the United States was "mad to try to prop up South Vietnam." Even within the Agency, the intelligence analysts were also convinced that a Communist victory was inevitable. Only Allen Dulles and the experts in clandestine operations were eager to use Vietnam as a laboratory to test the efficacy of counterinsurgency programs within the Third World.[8]

The IRC Enters Vietnam

At this crucial juncture, the IRC entered the Vietnamese scene in both visible and covert roles. In early August 1954 Harold Stassen, the head of the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA), the U.S. overseas aid program, urged the Committee to become involved in refugee aid in Vietnam. One of Lansdale's first covert operations had been designed to entice the Catholic minority in the North to relocate in the South. With the active encouragement of village priests, as well as a CIA psychological warfare campaign that mixed horrific tales of Viet Minh terror and vague threats of a U.S. nuclear attack on the North with fables of the good life in the South, hundreds of thousands of refugees were cajoled into moving.[9] Stassen urged the IRC to develop a relief program aimed at these refugees.

Leo Cherne, as the Committee's chair, immediately responded to Stassen's request by traveling to Vietnam on an exploratory mission. His stated aim was to assess the potential for an IRC relief program for the new refugees, but he was also there to evaluate the overall political and economic situation. With U.S. policy still very much in flux, Cherne's visit came at a delicate moment. Upon his return, Cherne wrote a detailed memorandum on his trip to Dorothy Houghton, deputy director of FOA, with responsibility for refugee programs. Cherne observed that U.S. prestige had been severely damaged by the uncritical support given to French colonial rule in Indochina. Given the Diem government's ties to the United States, most Vietnamese continued to doubt "the honesty and the sincerity of [the] anti-French orientation of the government."[10]

Cherne also noted the endemic corruption permeating governmental agencies, a problem that had not been seriously addressed by the Saigon government. Diem had failed to control the gangster elements, which continued to profit from extensive gambling operations, while his authority over the armed forces remained illusory. At the same time, the French remained a powerful influence, commanding the loyalty of key military and civilian officials. As a result, Diem was "a virtual prisoner" of the military and the private armies of powerful mobsters; he was "sustained in office solely by the United States government." In contrast to the Saigon regime and its many shortcomings, the Viet Minh "continue to appear the only sincere anti-French movement." Despite all of these obstacles, however, Cherne concluded that the United States should continue to furnish aid to Diem and that the IRC could be very helpful in winning, and then consolidating, a popular base of support for the newly installed government.[11]

Yet the problem was not only in Vietnam. According to Cherne, as the American people came to a greater understanding of Vietnamese politics,

there would be "a growing feeling within the United States that we might as well adopt a position of 'a plague on both your houses.' " Cherne proposed that a group of prominent Americans travel to Vietnam and then report to the public on "the extraordinarily useful role" being undertaken by U.S. government agencies. A concerted public relations campaign was essential so that the "disillusionment may be minimized when the American people learn of the complexities, difficulties, and even sordid nature of some aspects of the Vietnamese situation." Presenting Diem in a positive light to the people of the United States and South Vietnam had to be fixed as a priority objective of government policy.[12]

Cherne did not limit his reports on the Vietnamese political situation to officials in the U.S. foreign aid program. Another memorandum addressed to William J. Donovan, the former head of OSS, was even more pessimistic in its assessment of future prospects than the one sent to Houghton. According to Cherne, Diem was an "ascetic" who had assumed power "without a base of popular support in South Vietnam." The Viet Minh insurgents controlled "important pockets in South Vietnam only miles from Saigon" and were strongly contesting for control over much of the countryside. Communist forces had considerable authority among the poorer people, although Cherne insisted that this support flowed "not out of affection for the Communists as much as out of protest against French colonialism." In any case, he admitted to Donovan that "if a vote were taken in all of Vietnam today, virtually all observers agree it would go heavily Communist." Nevertheless, the situation was still not one of "total hopelessness." Among the favorable factors, there was the personality of Diem, who was "a man of extraordinary stature and intellect." Also, the French were finally withdrawing, and the money "being poured in" by the United States was providing a boost to the economy. On balance, "the odds are heavily against freedom, and this means that the effort must be gigantic and well directed" for it to succeed.[13]

Cherne was only one of several influential Americans who traveled to Saigon during this critical period and reported his assessment of the situation back to high government officials. Although influential figures within the Eisenhower administration remained wary of Diem, in part because they viewed him as a Vietnamese nationalist hostile to foreign influences, official support for his regime continued to deepen. In late August, the National Security Council decided to "make every possible effort" to sustain a South Vietnamese government friendly to the United States. In line with this strategic priority, the United States would provide economic aid to the Diem regime "directly, rather than through the medium of the French Government."[14]

The United States had finally determined to supplant the French as the dominant power in Southeast Asia. Two months later, the NSC further

increased the Eisenhower administration's commitment to the Diem regime by "setting in motion a crash program designed to bring about an improvement in the loyalty and effectiveness" of its military forces.[15] Cherne's visit to Saigon, and the memoranda that followed, coincided with the U.S. decision to make South Vietnam a primary battleground in the global confrontation between the rival superpowers.

While in Saigon, Cherne had met with the highest officials in the new government, gaining their confidence and support for an IRC presence. Soon after his return, Cherne received a note from Premier Diem stressing the "urgent [and] immediate necessity" of relief programs aimed at the educated elite, especially the "anti-communist political leaders" among them. In Diem's view, it was "not possible to overstate the importance of the opinions of these leaders in the struggle with Communist imperialism for the minds and hopes of our people." Diem eagerly anticipated a more active role for the IRC in Vietnam because he knew of its "specialized role" in "rescuing leaders in the anti-communist and anti-fascist struggles in Europe."[16]

The IRC also received encouragement from high U.S. officials. Harold Stassen reviewed Cherne's memorandum on his trip to Saigon and concluded that an extension of the Committee's activities to South Vietnam "would be most welcome." With this backing, Cherne quickly convened an emergency meeting of the IRC board of directors. For its first twenty years, the organization had concentrated exclusively on aiding political refugees from Europe, but from this point onward its scope would be global, with Asia as a primary focus of activity. Cherne's proposal to expand into Vietnam met with the "ardent" enthusiasm of William Donovan, who had resumed his participation in the Committee after serving a one-year term as U.S. ambassador to Thailand.[17]

The board accepted Cherne's proposal and agreed to a "change in the Charter of the IRC to enable IRC to work in Asia." Diem would be notified of this decision, but only "after consultation and clearance with [the] State Department and FOA." To implement the new program, the IRC established a separate fund for Vietnam and sent Joseph Buttinger as a special representative to set the groundwork for the project. In early October 1954, Buttinger left for a ten-week stint in Vietnam, knowing little or nothing about the country or Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the IRC board believed that his experience as a leader in the Austrian socialist underground, and later as the Committee's director of refugee relief in postwar Europe, would enable him to provide Diem with insightful advice in developing an attractive alternative to the Viet Minh.[18]

Buttinger had considerable latitude in establishing an elaborate set of psychological warfare programs, although Cherne had already outlined several potential areas of interest for the Committee in his reports on the Vietnamese situation. In his memorandum to Donovan, Cherne had emphasized the importance of developing projects directed at the intellectuals found among the Catholic refugees who had streamed to the South after the armistice. These intellectuals would be a "prime target in all Communist efforts at penetration," because of "the importance of these opinion-makers." At the same time, the Diem regime sought to gain their allegiance because of its urgent need for trained personnel. Cherne's report to Houghton at FOA had specifically proposed the creation of a Free University as a critical step in winning the support of Vietnamese refugee intellectuals. Programs designed to open up positions for refugees who had been secondary school teachers and students were also viewed as priority objectives.[19]

Buttinger went to Vietnam with a mandate to focus the Committee's relief efforts on the educated minority among the recent refugees from the North, most of them Catholics and supporters of Diem. In devising these programs, the IRC had already pledged to "cooperate completely and in every possible way" with "all agencies of the United States government and [to] work closely with the Vietnamese government" as well. Close consultation with government agencies was essential to ensure that IRC programs were "in total harmony with the purposes and objectives of the [American] government."[20] In the fall of 1954, the CIA acted as the government agency actually implementing U.S. counterinsurgency operations against the Viet Minh.

Buttinger's ten-week stay in Vietnam was extremely hectic, filled with frequent and lengthy meetings with high level officials in the U.S. mission and with top officials in the Saigon regime. Diem and Buttinger met often, once for five hours, and developed a close working relationship, a seemingly unlikely outcome given their dramatically different backgrounds. Buttinger was raised by working-class parents in a provincial town in Austria. Although his formal education had ended after the sixth grade, Buttinger gained his knowledge of the world through his experiences as a socialist militant, a movement rooted in a secular ideology hostile to organized religion. As a child of the Vietnamese elite, Diem had been educated in private schools before attending the school for public administration in Hué. An aristocrat by upbringing and temperament, autocratic in his style, Diem was deeply religious in his convictions.[21] Despite the differences in their background and world-view, the two were linked by a fervent conviction that the defeat of a Communist insurrection required more than purely military measures. Indeed, the two agreed that a comprehensive program of social and economic structural reform had to be devised, and then implemented. Only by instituting these measures, in conjunction with creative psychological warfare programs, could the Diem regime hope to successfully

Joseph Buttinger confers with Premier Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon, fall 1954. *Photograph courtesy of the International Rescue Committee.*

undercut the popular base of support sustaining the Communist insurgents.

Buttinger later denied cooperating with CIA officers during this critical stay in Vietnam, insisting that he had only met Colonel Lansdale once, in passing, at an embassy cocktail party. This denial lacks credibility given the pervasive role played by the Agency during the early days of the Diem regime. In fact, Buttinger negotiated a memorandum of agreement with a key CIA officer, Samuel Adams, detailing the IRC role in the overall Vietnam program. Adams was operating under cover within the U.S. Operations Mission Education Department, as a field representative for the Foreign Operations Administration, so the negotiations were ostensibly between the IRC and FOA. Both parties agreed that the Vietnamese political situation made "it inadvisable for U.S. government agencies to undertake certain projects which a voluntary agency need not hesitate to undertake." The IRC succeeded in fulfilling that role.[22]

In the months following Buttinger's departure, the Committee initiated a series of projects utilizing refugee intellectuals to win popular support for

the Diem regime. One program established Popular Cultural Associations in rural areas, providing basic literacy classes using educated refugees from the North as teachers. Freedom Centers were initiated in selected areas as "community-gathering places for Vietnamese intellectuals and students." The IRC also funded the University of Hué, which employed scholars who had fled from the North on its faculty.[23]

Operation Brotherhood

While the Committee focused its efforts in South Vietnam on educational programs, it also acted as a sponsor for two projects that brought medical services to isolated regions. One of the projects, Operation Brotherhood, was a CIA operation from start to finish. Lansdale had been selected to head the CIA station in Saigon because of his earlier success in the Philippines, where, from 1950 through 1953, he had advised the government on a program of psychological warfare aimed at defeating a Communist insurrection. Soon after his arrival in Saigon in early June 1954, Lansdale decided to initiate a covert operation that would utilize the Filipino experience with counterinsurgency programs.[24]

To provide cover, the Philippines Junior Chamber of Commerce assumed official sponsorship of the project. Initially, project teams were assigned to Saigon, helping Catholic refugees who had recently arrived from the North. Soon medical teams were at work throughout South Vietnam, some even in Laos and Cambodia. More than one hundred Filipino doctors and nurses were deployed under the auspices of Operation Brotherhood—not an insignificant number given that the end of French colonial rule had left South Vietnam with less than a hundred qualified indigenous doctors.[25]

Operation Brotherhood was judged an enormous success by the CIA and by Diem, who, according to the IRC, believed that it "was having [a] profound psychological impact on the people of Vietnam." Lansdale later wrote that "the presence of medical personnel" furnished "the ideal answer to meeting the initial suspicion that foreigners evoke." Medical assistance proved to be an extremely effective cover for intelligence gathering and psychological warfare throughout Southeast Asia. Beyond collecting intelligence, offering medical aid created a foothold for a sophisticated campaign directed at manipulating Vietnamese public opinion. Once health clinics were fully functional, community centers, such as the Popular Cultural Associations, could be established, allowing village peasants to enroll in basic courses teaching handicrafts and agronomy. Lansdale was determined that such educational programs "must be closely supervised," so that government propaganda could be convincingly presented. "The ideological im-

plications must be subtly interwoven into these courses," and the teachers selected needed to be "foreign indoctrinated personnel."[26] The IRC in Saigon gave administrative support to these programs of psychological warfare.

Operation Brotherhood was conceived, controlled, and funded by Colonel Lansdale and the CIA, and yet, as a covert operation, it needed plausible cover to legitimize its credibility as a private, independent project providing humanitarian aid to the unfortunate. The International Rescue Committee proved extremely useful in this regard. In February 1955, the IRC joined with the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce as the chief sponsors of a major fund-raising campaign. Two prominent progressives, Reinhold Niebuhr and Eleanor Roosevelt, accepted the position of honorary chairs of the drive, with former OSS director William Donovan and Joseph Buttinger named as two of the vice-chairs. In addition, prominent liberals such as Justice William Douglas, along with Senators Paul Douglas and John Kennedy, served on the Operation Brotherhood national committee. Finally, President Eisenhower sent an open letter to the committee's officers giving "the blessings of the White House" to the project.[27]

Raising funds for Operation Brotherhood in Vietnam served as a secondary goal of the drive, with one hundred twenty thousand dollars above expenses collected during the first months of 1955—a negligible share of the operation's total expenditures, most of which were borne by the CIA.[28] Nevertheless, the publicity campaign increased the visibility of Operation Brotherhood, while enhancing its legitimacy. The campaign also provided an excellent opportunity to persuade the American people of the urgent necessity of aiding the Diem regime.

In addition to Operation Brotherhood, the IRC sponsored Dr. Thomas Dooley, the most visible proponent of anticommunist medicine. As a navy doctor stationed in the Pacific, Dooley volunteered for service in the Hanoi–Haiphong area in the fall of 1954. Under the recently signed Geneva accords, the French temporarily held the zone, so refugees moving to South Vietnam could leave by ship from the port of Haiphong. Relying on his experiences in treating these refugees, Dooley authored a widely read book, *Deliver Us from Evil,* presenting the Viet Minh as brutal totalitarians. Six U.S. officials who were stationed in Hanoi–Haiphong during the same time later wrote a lengthy, albeit secret, critique of the book for the U.S. Information Agency, a report that has only recently been declassified. In this critique, the six held that Dooley's book was "not the truth" and that the accounts presented were "nonfactual and exaggerated." Nonetheless, the book was a popular success in this country and around the world.[29]

After leaving Vietnam and resigning from the navy, Dooley returned to the United States with the idea of gaining the financial resources needed to

Dr. Thomas Dooley in his hospital in the mountains of Laos. *Photograph courtesy of the International Rescue Committee.*

open a rural hospital in Indochina. He approached Leo Cherne and Angier Biddle Duke for support, and met with an enthusiastic response. Cherne and Dooley would remain close friends until the latter's death. In July 1956 Dooley started a hospital "under the aegis of IRC" in the mountains of Laos, near the Vietnamese border. The hospital served the Meo tribe, who were then being employed by the CIA to harass the flow of supplies coming into South Vietnam from the North.[30]

Dooley would open a series of hospitals in the mountains of Laos over the next few years, returning frequently to the United States on fund-raising tours. On each of these trips he was debriefed by CIA operatives, who mistrusted him as a flamboyant personality who was difficult to control. Notwithstanding, "Dooley kept the agency posted on troop movements and villager sentiments around his Laos hospitals," that is, he provided critical military intelligence to the U.S. counterinsurgency forces in South Vietnam.[31]

During one of his fund-raising trips, Dooley initiated a new organization

to establish medical clinics throughout the Third World. The Medical International Cooperation Organization (MEDICO) was founded in February 1958, with Albert Schweitzer as honorary patron. Again Cherne and Duke supported Dooley, and the IRC charter was amended to include medical assistance as a primary focus for the Committee's activities, with MEDICO functioning as an organizational affiliate. Dooley was a superlative fund-raiser and propagandist, but his organizational skills were questionable. MEDICO operations expanded rapidly; it had programs in fourteen countries by 1960, when Dooley opted to establish the organization as an independent entity, thereby cutting all formal ties with the IRC. Entirely dependent on its founder's personal charisma for money, MEDICO collapsed when Dooley died in 1961, shortly after having been diagnosed with an advanced case of cancer. Its surviving remnants were absorbed into the Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE), another agency specializing in refugee relief.[32]

While Dr. Dooley's medical empire rose and fell, the Committee decided to limit its presence in South Vietnam after 1956. First the Poznan incident in Poland, and then the Hungarian rebellion, focused the world's attention on the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe. As a result, the Committee reaffirmed its commitment to aid refugees from the Soviet bloc countries, directing almost all of its resources to the hundreds of thousands fleeing Hungary after the Soviet invasion. By 1960, the IRC had "no substantial function in Vietnam," having transferred most of its projects in that country to the sponsorship of the Asia Foundation, a CIA proprietary similar in function to the National Committee for a Free Europe. The IRC maintained its ties to the University of Hué, but even this commitment came to an end in August 1963, in protest of the Diem regime's brutal repression of demonstrations led by Buddhist monks.[33]

Escalating War and Relief

In early 1965, soon after the U.S. decision to sharply escalate the war, Phan Huy Quat, premier in the Saigon government, asked the Committee to return to Vietnam. This message was transmitted to the IRC by Wesley Bishel, a personal friend of Quat's, with the approval of Chester Cooper of the National Security Council staff. A few days later, President Lyndon Johnson highlighted the importance of economic aid in a major public address. Praising the work already being accomplished in South Vietnam by privately funded relief agencies, Johnson urged a deepening of the commitment, stating that "we welcome others to their ranks." At the same time, American aerial bombardment of the South Vietnamese countryside was being set as a strategic priority.[34]

The United States first introduced combat troops into the battle zone under the operational strategy of search and destroy. U.S. paratroopers were to clear enemy units from strategic sections of the countryside. They would be followed by South Vietnamese soldiers, who were to hold the newly captured areas against the guerrilla forces of the National Liberation Front. This strategy proved a total failure, primarily because of the lackluster performance of the South Vietnamese troops.

General William Westmoreland, overall commander of U.S. troops in Vietnam, proceeded to abandon the search-and-destroy tactic for a new military strategy: saturation bombing. Squadrons of B-52 bombers were sent on bombing raids over territory held by the guerrillas, with orders to drop massive quantities of powerful explosives. Anyone who remained in a "free fire zone" became a legitimate target for the bombers. A former U.S. military intelligence officer who served in Vietnam noted that "an integral part of the strategy was the forced depopulation of vast areas of rural South Vietnam." The U.S. military command had chosen to employ "every weapon in their arsenal to separate the remaining Vietnamese rural population" from the Communist guerrilla forces. Saturation bombing began in earnest in June 1965, and, within eighteen months, over 1.5 million refugees had poured into the metropolitan areas searching for safety. Once again, refugee relief became high priority, so the IRC returned to Vietnam.[35]

In quick response to President Johnson's public request, Leo Cherne, as IRC chair, flew to Saigon to initiate a new set of relief programs, leaving with a pledge to raise $2.5 million so that three hundred fifty thousand Vietnamese refugees could receive essential medical services, food, and clothing. Phan Huy Quat, having recently been forced to resign as premier by the South Vietnamese military, agreed to oversee a project directed at the many war orphans roaming the streets of Saigon.[36]

Although most of the IRC projects created in the 1960s were directed at Vietnamese refugees from U.S. bombing raids, Cherne looked into the "possibility of cooperation" between the Committee and the U.S. Special Forces, or Green Berets. Specially trained paramilitary units were being airlifted into hostile territory on raids and intelligence missions. Each of these units included a trained medic, so Cherne explored the potential for a Committee project to provide these medics with drugs for distribution in areas held by the National Liberation Front. This proposal graphically demonstrates the close ties between the Committee's role in South Vietnam and the U.S. military presence, and it also indicates how medical aid can become an integral component of a coordinated counterinsurgency program designed to suppress a popular guerrilla army.[37]

The IRC continued to consolidate its presence in South Vietnam even

after U.S. combat troops were withdrawn in the spring of 1973. In April 1973, a high-level IRC delegation was sent to South Vietnam to examine the entire refugee situation and to report its findings to the highest levels of government. Leonard Marks, former director of the U.S. Information Agency and a close friend of former president Lyndon Johnson, agreed to serve on this special commission. (Marks would be named IRC president soon after returning from South Vietnam.) In March 1973, Marks attended a small, exclusive stag dinner at the White House with President Richard Nixon, at which the two informally discussed the upcoming trip to Vietnam. Marks later informed Cherne that Nixon had confirmed the "full cooperation" of the government, as previously promised by Secretary of State William Rogers, and had then "invited" Marks to come to the White House upon his return.[38]

At the same time, Cherne met with the South Vietnamese ambassador to the United States, Tran Van Chuong, before joining the mission to Saigon. Since Joseph Buttinger would also be going to South Vietnam, Cherne warned Chuong that some of those in the delegation "would undoubtedly express deep concern about the political prisoners being detained by his government." Still, Cherne assured Chuong "that it was not our desire or intention either to embarrass his government or [to] participate in a purely propagandistic gesture."[39]

Chuong conveyed to Cherne the special regard felt by the ruling military junta in Saigon for the IRC leadership, and he relayed their feelings of "a particular debt to Buttinger, Duke, and Cherne" for their early efforts to promote the Diem regime and for "the formation of the American Friends of Vietnam." The South Vietnamese generals "were especially sensitive to Buttinger's departure from his previous support of U.S. policies in Vietnam," but they were "especially pleased that Buttinger is returning to Vietnam and hopeful that the 'misunderstandings' can be ended or diminished."[40]

By this time, Buttinger was thoroughly disenchanted with the U.S. presence in Vietnam. He had decided to join the IRC mission in the hope of convincing the Committee to finance a relief project aimed at helping recently released prisoners belonging to the noncommunist, nationalist opposition. While in South Vietnam, Buttinger was allowed to speak with leading dissidents, who reported that more than seventy thousand political prisoners were still being held by the Saigon government and that the treatment of prisoners was harsh, with torture commonplace.[41]

Buttinger urged the Committee to provide significant aid to released political prisoners, although he recognized that the hostility of the South Vietnamese military rulers would greatly limit the potential benefits of such

a program. In spite of Buttinger's central role in the history of the IRC presence in Vietnam, his proposal was rejected. The report of the entire mission, which Buttinger signed, called upon the Committee to raise a million dollars for medical teams, refugee resettlement, and care for the orphans of war, but left unmentioned programs to aid political prisoners of the military dictatorship. Thus, to the end, Buttinger remained a loyal insider, working quietly within the International Rescue Committee, unwilling to confront the implications of the Committee's continuing commitment to furthering U.S. foreign policy.[42]

However, Buttinger did publicly voice his objections to the repressive policies being followed by the South Vietnamese government. In an article in the *New York Review of Books,* he chastised the military junta led by General Nguyen Van Thieu for holding more than one hundred thousand political prisoners in prison, many of them noncommunist dissidents. Buttinger urged the United States to press the junta to release these prisoners not only "in the interests of justice and humanity," but also because this move would provide the only "chance of developing a political force capable of mobilizing sufficient mass support for a regime dominated neither by Thieu nor by communism." Otherwise, Saigon would soon fall to the North Vietnamese. Even after twenty years of disastrous failure, Buttinger still believed the United States had a role to play in South Vietnam, helping to create a viable alternative to a popular Communist insurgency.[43]

Throughout the final, ignominious years of the war in Vietnam, the IRC remained an integral component of the U.S. presence, even after the war had triggered a mass movement of opposition. The Committee's experience encompassed virtually the entire cycle of the war, from the first exhilarating days of Diem's consolidation of power in the fall of 1954 through the period of the massive U.S. military presence in the 1960s to the final Communist victory in April 1975. Even after the war ended, the IRC received a government grant of $4 million to resettle Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in America.[44] To the bitter end, the Committee remained unwaveringly committed to sustaining the U.S. presence in South Vietnam.

Its lengthy experience in Vietnam transformed the IRC from an organization focused on Europe to one with a global perspective. Yet Vietnam also gave the Committee the opportunity to experiment with a qualitatively different type of project: a propaganda campaign designed to influence domestic public opinion. In undertaking this project, the Committee ventured even further into the covert network, while it veered even further from its initial course.

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Selling the War

Vietnam gave the International Rescue Committee the opportunity to apply the expertise it had gained in handling political refugees from the Soviet bloc countries to the exigencies of a Third World counterinsurgency campaign. Intrinsic to the U.S. drive to defeat the Viet Minh was an extensive program of psychological warfare, designed to mold and manipulate the views of the Vietnamese people. The Cold War had raised propaganda to a central position in the unceasing conflicts between the rival superpowers. A diverse assortment of organizations operating within the covert network cooperated with the CIA in disseminating the U.S. line throughout the world. Although the IRC, as a refugee relief agency, normally operated within a different segment of the network, Vietnam would change this.

From the inception of the U.S. role in Vietnam, decision makers were fearful of the lack of domestic public support for the venture. Joseph Buttinger responded to this perceived need by initiating a new organization, the American Friends of Vietnam, dedicated to promoting the Saigon regime of Ngo Dinh Diem in America. Although a nominally independent organization, the AFVN was intimately intertwined with the IRC. Indeed, several individuals, including Buttinger, were executive officers of both organizations.

When Buttinger returned from his mission to South Vietnam in December 1954, he was ready to represent the Saigon regime to the American public. In a series of public statements, Buttinger claimed that Premier Ngo Dinh Diem commanded widespread and enthusiastic support among the Vietnamese people for his sincere commitment to a program of social reform and economic justice, a program that would soon establish the prerequisite basis for a genuine democracy. Although the Viet Minh insurgents remained a dangerous threat, primarily because of the supply of men and materiel from the North, the Diem government had an excellent chance of

consolidating its power throughout South Vietnam, thereby guaranteeing the United States a friendly ally in Southeast Asia.

A January 1955 interview with Joseph Lash of the *New York Post*, then the foremost newspaper of liberal opinion, found Buttinger extolling Diem as the only man who had "standing with the [Vietnamese] people." Furthermore, Communist and French propaganda was "responsible for the mounting underestimation" of the Diem regime and its ability to rule. With a modest program of economic aid and technical advisers, South Vietnam "could be transformed, by Asian standards, into a little paradise."[1]

Soon after returning to the United States, Buttinger sought to enlist Norman Thomas, the renowned leader of U.S. social democracy, in the campaign to defend the new Saigon government. According to Buttinger, in the Diem regime, the United States had found "a true friend and one which represents the people. Given sufficient aid, it can maintain South Vietnam in the camp of freedom."[2]

A memorandum circulated within influential government circles was even more profuse in its praise. Buttinger had "become intimately acquainted" with Diem and had found him "a man of extraordinary strength, courage, integrity, and political ability." The Vietnamese situation was far from hopeless; indeed, the actual situation in South Vietnam was "one of relative Communist weakness." Defeating the Communist insurgency had "a better chance in Vietnam than all military efforts during the last ten years have had."[3]

Despite the bravado, Buttinger understood that it would be difficult to salvage the Diem regime, and yet he saw no alternative but to try. Vietnam had become a crucial test of U.S. foreign policy in the Third World. Should Diem fall, the choices would narrow to a Communist victory or military dictatorship, neither of which Buttinger found acceptable. In November 1954, while still in Vietnam, he informed Cherne that "giving up [on] Diem at this point would mean giving up [on] the idea of waging the battle against Communism in Asia on the political front, leaving the decision up to arms."[4]

Privately, Buttinger admitted that the holding of democratic elections throughout Vietnam, as mandated by the 1954 Geneva agreement, would necessarily lead to "a Communist regime for Vietnam." Nevertheless, South Vietnam "could be saved if the proper policy were pursued," a policy entailing massive U.S. military and economic aid, as well as a thoroughgoing program of land reform. The Saigon government required "a period of several years" in which the two Vietnamese regimes could "coexist," after which the situation would "be vastly different," and the United States would then be in the position of being able to count on South Vietnam as a dependable ally.[5]

Even during his stay in Saigon during the fall of 1954, Buttinger clearly realized that the Diem regime was both repressive and highly unpopular. Nevertheless, these concerns were subordinated to the strategic exigencies, as Buttinger became a vocal and uncritical supporter of Diem. During his Vietnam sojourn, Buttinger had informed Cherne that most Vietnamese believed that their country needed "a strong man at the head." Indeed, "the real danger in my opinion is not an authoritarianism, but a personal regime, against which Diem has to be warned." Once back in the United States, where he continued to receive reports of repressive measures taken against Vietnamese opposition figures, Buttinger found himself trapped in a dilemma. Desperately eager to maintain his close personal relationship with Diem, he also knew that the widespread arrests of noncommunist dissidents could only discredit the Saigon regime. Buttinger suffered through "sleepless nights" before finally sending a cautiously critical letter "at the risk of losing my present standing with Diem and his closest friends." Diem took several months before responding with a curt denial of the problem.[6]

When Buttinger returned to the United States in late December 1954, he immediately embarked on a whirlwind of activity. Articles defending Diem appeared in the *Reporter* and the *New Leader,* two influential magazines oriented toward liberal intellectuals. Buttinger met privately with the editors of *Time, Newsweek,* and the *New York Times,* and soon afterward, the *Times* editorially extolled Diem as "a nationalist leader who is serious about making peaceful, democratic, and thoroughgoing reforms." Buttinger spoke before the elite Council on Foreign Relations; he also met privately with several prominent liberal senators, including Mike Mansfield and Hubert Humphrey. John Kennedy was visiting California at the time, so his chief aide, Ted Sorenson, received a briefing from Buttinger.[7]

Overnight, Buttinger had become a leading authority on Vietnam, with access to powerful figures who helped to determine U.S. foreign policy. For someone who had spent several perilous years in the 1930s as leader of the Austrian revolutionary socialist underground, this was bound to be an exhilarating experience. In a later explanation of this period, Buttinger insisted that Cardinal Francis Joseph Spellman, the Catholic archbishop of New York and a powerful force for conservative politics, had provided many of the necessary contacts. Spellman had approached Joseph Kennedy, John Kennedy's father and an influential figure within the Democratic party, and the senior Kennedy had provided Buttinger with the needed introductions to congressional leaders. While the Cardinal exerted considerable political leverage, Buttinger's immediate access to key decision makers cannot be explained solely by the support he received from the Catholic Church and from Cardinal Spellman.[8]

Working in close tandem with Buttinger was Harold Oram, the intrepid public relations expert for anticommunist causes. Oram had been instrumental in founding the Emergency Rescue Committee in 1940, and he and his staff had been providing the IRC with publicity and fund-raising experts since 1949.[9] Although Oram certainly kept in contact with Spellman, who had been a staunch defender of Diem from the time of Diem's earlier stay in the United States, Oram and Buttinger had a more powerful patron, Allen Dulles, director of central intelligence.

Dulles kept close watch over Buttinger's flurry of efforts in support of Diem. The two maintained a correspondence using Oram as a conduit, with Buttinger sending reports to Dulles analyzing the Vietnamese situation, as well as updates on his propagandistic efforts throughout the United States. As Buttinger continued his round of speeches in defense of Diem, Dulles decided "to have a member of [the] CIA staff get in touch with" Buttinger, in order to provide him with a full briefing on recent developments in Vietnam.[10] Buttinger's propaganda campaign was intended to persuade the American people that the Communist insurgents in Vietnam could be defeated and that Diem was the person to do it. The media blitz surrounding Buttinger's return from Vietnam represents an important example of a psychological warfare program guided by CIA operatives, and yet targeted at domestic public opinion.

After his return from Vietnam, Buttinger also began to organize a public campaign in support of Diem, one that would go well beyond his own speeches and writings. Buttinger and Oram decided to form a new organization for this purpose, the American Friends of Vietnam, with many of its leaders drawn from the International Rescue Committee. Leo Cherne and Angier Biddle Duke, the chair and president of the Committee, joined Buttinger and Oram to constitute the initial nucleus of the new venture. Wesley Fishel soon entered this core group, and then remained a central participant within the AFVN. A personal friend of Diem's since 1950, Fishel provided academic cover for U.S. aid to the Saigon regime. As a professor at Michigan State University, Fishel supervised an extensive university project aimed at improving the efficiency of public administration within South Vietnam. One component of the project provided training to the Sûreté, Diem's secret police force, and even furnished them with guns and ammunition. The MSU project also provided cover for a unit of CIA experts in counterintelligence, who served as liaison with the secret police.[11]

For Michigan State, the Vietnam project seemed an excellent opportunity to gain government support for increased funding. Yet the project remained a risky venture; indeed, MSU president John Hannah would later claim that

he had "recognized at the beginning that we were involving ourselves in some activities that were hardly appropriate for a university to be concerned with, but because it seemed in the United States' national interest" and because high officials within the Eisenhower administration had stressed the importance of the project, "we agreed to do what we were asked to do." By 1962 Diem had terminated the project, and four years later *Ramparts* published a highly embarrassing description of the university's dubious foray into the covert network.[12]

The American Friends of Vietnam coordinated the campaign to promote Diem's image in the United States. In its founding statement, the AFVN pledged to "call on our government to support in every possible way the struggle under Premier Diem to remain free." As one of its more independent-minded members wrote, the AFVN acted as "the uncritical spokesman for and defender of the Diem regime." Buttinger was the spark plug of the new organization, functioning first as vice-chair and then as chair of the executive committee. Decisions were made within the fourteen-member executive committee, which consisted primarily of key officers of the IRC, academic experts, and leading progressives. The only outsider among the top officers was General John "Iron Mike" O'Daniel, who agreed to serve as chair of the AFVN upon retiring from the army in March 1956. O'Daniel, an infantry commander during World War II and the Korean War, had headed the U.S. military mission to South Vietnam from the first months of 1954 to the fall of 1955—a period marked by Diem's consolidation of power. An early and ardent proponent of direct U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and an unflinching partisan of Diem, O'Daniel's conservative politics placed him at odds with most of the other members of the executive committee. Nevertheless, O'Daniel's visible position as AFVN chair deflected hostile attacks from right-wingers, many of whom were suspicious of Diem because of his previous resistance to French colonial rule.[13]

In addition to O'Daniel and IRC executive officers, the American Friends of Vietnam sought the support of prominent progressives and social democrats. After all, the importance of projecting a nationalist alternative to French colonial rule had long provided a rallying cry for liberal critics of the Eisenhower administration's foreign policy. Norman Thomas and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. joined the AFVN board during the first year of operation, and Supreme Court Justice William Douglas, an early partisan of Diem, lent his name to the organization as a member of its national committee. The AFVN also received the public endorsement of influential congressional liberals, such as Senators Mike Mansfield and John Kennedy, both of whom joined the national committee.

A Paid Lobbyist

To actually implement the AFVN programs, the executive board relied on Harold Oram and his firm of anticommunist propaganda experts. Shortly after the AFVN was formed, Oram solicited the public relations contract for the new Saigon government. Buttinger warmly recommended Oram to the South Vietnamese ambassador in Washington, Tran Van Chuong, stressing that he had worked with Oram for more than ten years within the IRC and that he could therefore "unhesitatingly endorse their [Oram and associates] proposal."[14]

With Buttinger's support, the South Vietnamese government chose the Oram organization as its paid lobbyist. The contract guaranteed a payment of three thousand dollars a month, including the hiring of a full-time coordinator for the publicity campaign. From 1956 to 1961, when the contract was finally terminated, that coordinator was Gilbert Jonas, who had already served as the first executive director of the AFVN and who sat on its executive committee while being employed by Harold Oram Inc. and, thus, indirectly by Diem. Oram had won the contract by proposing a campaign to mobilize support for Diem by assisting "in the development of groups of American citizens" who supported his regime. "One of our principal duties," he assured the Saigon government, would involve providing assistance to the American Friends of Vietnam.[15]

Although the bulk of the staff time needed to organize the AFVN came from those on the payroll of the Oram firm, which also served as the paid lobbyist of the South Vietnamese government, the IRC was closely linked to the AFVN throughout its formative years. Angier Biddle Duke served as the first chair of the AFVN executive committee, while simultaneously acting as the full-time president of the IRC. Indeed, the connections between the two organizations were so dense and complex that the AFVN executive committee spent "dreary months of wasted discussion" in sorting out the "financial and organizational difficulties arising out of AFVN's relations to the IRC," tensions that were still unresolved in 1956.[16]

With funding and support being provided by the IRC and the South Vietnamese government through Oram's firm, the AFVN did not require large sums of additional aid. However, small amounts were apparently funneled to the organization through CIA conduit foundations. For instance, in the early 1960s, the David, Josephine, and Winfield Baird Fund acted as a conduit for fifty thousand dollars of covert funding to the American Friends of the Middle East. During those same years, the Baird Fund made small contributions to the AFVN and the IRC.[17]

The American Friends of Vietnam furthered Diem's cause through a

Senator John F. Kennedy speaks at a conference of the American Friends of Vietnam in June 1956. *U.S. Army photograph.*

variety of measures, including two national conferences in 1956 and 1959. These conferences brought high-level U.S. government officials, academic experts, and corporate executives together with representatives from the South Vietnamese government in a forum that facilitated the strengthening of personal contacts, while also generating favorable media attention. Senator John Kennedy spoke to the 1956 conference, lavishly praising the "amazing success of President Diem," as well as the "remarkable" program of social reforms already being implemented. According to Kennedy, Vietnam represented "the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia," so that the whole region, including India and Japan, "would be threatened if the red tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam."[18]

The 1959 conference took as its theme the importance of private foreign investment in promoting Vietnamese economic growth. Both Eisenhower and Diem sent cordial greetings to the conference, thanking the AFVN for its efforts. Buttinger, who served as conference chair, cited the two greet-

Attending the June 1956 AFVN conference from right to left, Joseph Buttinger, Angier Biddle Duke, General John O'Daniel, Tran Van Chuong (Saigon's ambassador to Washington), Leo Cherne, Dr. Thomas Dooley, Monsignor J. J. Hornett, and Frederick Bunting of the International Cooperation Administration. *U.S. Army photograph.*

ings as evidence that the work of the organization was "appreciated by those in high office who know how much the success of the government's policies depends on support by an informed public."[19]

Whenever the Saigon government came under attack for its repressive policies, the AFVN vigorously defended it. In October 1955 Diem authorized a plebiscite on his rule. The South Vietnamese people were permitted to choose between Emperor Bao Dai, who had cooperated with the French colonial rulers, and Ngo Dinh Diem, the authoritarian nationalist. Given this narrow range of choices, and considerable manipulation of the voting process, Diem received 98 percent of the vote, thereby deposing Bao Dai as head of state. Diem then cited this vote as proof of his popularity and as a rationale for blocking democratic elections for all of Vietnam, as mandated by the Geneva conference accords. A public statement signed by AFVN executive officers, including Buttinger, Cherne, and O'Daniel, hailed the 1955 plebiscite as "momentous free elections" that confirmed "the dedication of [the] Vietnamese to freedom."[20]

Oram and the AFVN were also effective in manipulating the media from

behind the scenes. A revealing example took advantage of the worldwide popularity enjoyed by Norman Thomas. Soon after the phony plebiscite, Oram urged Thomas to sign a public letter citing that election as evidence of Diem's popular standing. Oram held that Saigon had been justified in refusing to permit the scheduled nationwide elections, since the Viet Minh would "certainly win in an election taking place in the near future." A statement from Thomas would "do much to influence intellectual opinion in certain key countries, especially Britain, Burma, India, and Ceylon."[21]

Oram enclosed a draft of the proposed letter, which Thomas then signed, after having "made no changes" in the draft. The letter, which was then sent to influential newspapers in Europe and Asia, claimed that the overwhelming vote for Diem in the rigged plebiscite represented "a legal and moral mandate from the people." The letter signed by Thomas concluded that holding a single election in both parts of Vietnam, in accordance with the Geneva agreements, could "only be regarded as an imperialist endeavour contrary to the will of the South Vietnamese people."[22]

The campaign to mold opinion through the print media extended to the publication of books. Buttinger withdrew from his initial intensive commitment to the Diem cause in order to write a detailed history of Vietnam, the first in the English language. By the fall of 1957 the manuscript of the first volume, entitled *The Smaller Dragon*, covering the period up to 1900, was completed and readied for publication. In his foreword to this historical survey, Buttinger praised Diem "as a man of exceptional talent," whose base of support ran so deep that democratic elections "would certainly not produce a Communist majority in the South."[23]

Despite the fact that the book covered Vietnamese history well before the end of French colonial rule, Oram energetically promoted its distribution. In December 1957, Oram wrote to publisher Frederick Praeger, a recipient of CIA covert funding subsidizing the publication of a series of volumes with an anticommunist theme. Praeger's firm had already accepted Buttinger's manuscript, but Oram pressed Praeger to energetically promote the book. Oram insisted that it was "very important from every point of view that this book be received with the widest possible enthusiasm and [that it] get the best possible distribution." The goal was to project Buttinger as a respected authority on the Vietnamese situation, albeit one who defended the Saigon regime. In order to further this goal, Oram pledged that he would "get in touch with the various official agencies of the U.S. government, such as the State Department, USIA, CIA, ICA, etc." Buttinger's history of Vietnam would have the full backing of both the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments.[24]

Oram also promised that the book would receive sympathetic reviews in major publications; indeed, Buttinger's work garnered positive reviews in two of the nation's leading newspapers. The *Chicago Tribune* recommended the volume to its readers "who would know more of the colorful little nation," while the *Christian Science Monitor* hailed it as "an ambitious project" that succeeded in "lifting the curtain on the achievements" of the Vietnamese people.[25]

Misgivings About Vietnam

Until 1956, the American Friends of Vietnam defended the Saigon regime unswervingly and without hesitation. Buttinger insisted Diem deserved "an expression of astonishment, respect, and admiration." Diem, in turn, lavishly praised Buttinger, while lauding the work of the AFVN, as well as that of Oram's public relations firm, as "extraordinarily valuable."[26] In the wake of persistent reports of repressive security measures implemented by the Saigon government, the more liberal members of the executive committee began to express their misgivings, sparking divisive debates within the organization, with General O'Daniel pressing for unconditional loyalty to Diem. As a former military commander, O'Daniel had little patience for those concerned with the harsh measures directed at the noncommunist opposition in South Vietnam, arguing that anyone who publicly criticized Diem should be removed from the AFVN executive committee. Of course Diem had made a "few mistakes," but the general insisted that "when waging war, you have to be ruthless." In his view, the American Friends of Vietnam needed only the "strong anti-Communists with us," and he insisted that "we have had too many organizations in the U.S. that have already lost their usefulness because of some 'pinks', so let's be tough in that regard or [we] will lose ours." Buttinger, with Oram's cooperation, sought to hold together the hard-liners around O'Daniel with the friendly critics of Diem such as Norman Thomas. In Buttinger's opinion, the organization could "not afford to lose the General," and yet it was also essential to retain the support of prominent progressives.[27]

A catalyst to this dispute arose in 1956 when a leading Vietnamese social democrat, Pham Van Sa, was jailed by the Saigon government for his dissident views. Influential American social democrats, including David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and Norman Thomas, publicly protested the arrest and urged an immediate end to the autocratic repression practiced by the Diem regime. With Buttinger's approval, Oram pressed Diem to reconsider the arrest and to halt any further harassment of Vietnamese social democrats. Oram informed Diem that Dubinsky and Thomas were prominent figures in U.S.

politics and that their objections could not be ignored. He warned Diem that "we cannot afford to lose such friends." In spite of this advice, Diem refused to permit any organized opposition to his dictatorial rule.[28]

Even after this incident, Thomas continued to extol Diem. In January 1957, Thomas wrote the South Vietnamese president that he "held it a privilege to serve you and your country in your struggle for independence against the old colonial imperialism, and the new communist totalitarianism." However, by the summer of 1957, as Diem consolidated his autocratic rule, Thomas could no longer rationalize his effusive praise for the Saigon regime. Although he still believed that "Diem's government must be supported by the United States," he also opposed the use of "totalitarian tactics by non-Communist governments." Thomas felt so disturbed by the uncritical compliments lavished upon Diem by the AFVN that he began to consider his resignation from the organization. Although he accepted "that a great many situations in our troubled world require support of imperfect institutions and imperfect measures," he still did "not think they require uncritical support." (Thomas resigned a year later when the AFVN opened a campaign to encourage private foreign investment in South Vietnam.)[29]

Buttinger took a middle position in this dispute, pleading with Thomas to remain with the organization, but also opposing any suggestions for public criticism of the South Vietnamese government. In March 1958 Buttinger notified Thomas of his "serious reservations" about the AFVN and its uncritical support for Diem, concluding that "the lack of civil liberties is much too conspicuous in South Vietnam." Nevertheless, he still believed that "it can not be the purpose of our Committee to criticize the government of Ngo Dinh Diem publicly."[30]

In August 1958, Buttinger decided to visit Saigon again, in part to undertake research for his second volume covering twentieth-century Vietnamese history. Oram urged the Saigon authorities to provide Buttinger with every possible assistance. He was eager to cultivate and "develop independent experts and scholars on Vietnam in the United States." In this context, "Mr. Buttinger's efforts, and his proposed trip to Vietnam, are most important."[31]

Buttinger planned his trip in close conjunction with official circles, expecting the "full cooperation of all important Vietnamese governmental and economic positions," as well as "friendly assistance on the part of the American Embassy and the CIA." The Saigon government had agreed to permit Buttinger to meet with opposition leaders, even those in jail, with the understanding that should he "come to adverse conclusions," he "would not make use of any material thus obtained." In addition to articles written for public dissemination, Buttinger pledged to file "reports not for publication,

addressed to members of the Executive and Legislature, such as Allen Dulles in CIA, State Department, and [Senator] Mike Mansfield."[32]

In this context, it is hardly surprising that Buttinger left Saigon in the fall of 1958 with renewed faith; he firmly pledged to defend Diem's policies "with even more energy and enthusiasm than heretofore." During his stay, he enjoyed lengthy and frequent meetings with Diem, leading him to conclude that the "basic policies of the President are sound." Corruption continued to cause problems, but this represented "the exception" and it was being "honestly and vigorously fought."[33]

Upon his return from Vietnam, Buttinger prepared a major defense of the U.S. foreign aid program in the form of a lengthy review and critique of the controversial novel *The Ugly American* for the summer 1959 issue of *Dissent,* an influential journal of social democratic opinion. Buttinger assailed the novel's authors, William Lederer and Eugene Burdick, for presenting the U.S. intervention in Vietnam as a lost cause. In Buttinger's view, it was the Vietnamese Communists who had "lost all hopes of a victory which five years ago not even our most consistent optimists had the courage to doubt," and indeed the Viet Minh had "suffered a most disastrous defeat between 1954 and 1956, the first inflicted by its enemies on Communism in Asia with entirely political weapons."[34]

Buttinger claimed that Diem's economic policies had been so successful that "hunger has been eliminated in South Vietnam." With rice production continuing to soar, several more years of U.S. aid and protection would make it possible to achieve such a high level of output that export sales of rice would generate the revenues the South Vietnamese required for economic development, so that U.S. assistance "could be reduced substantially in the near future." Five years after Diem's authoritarian regime had first come to power, Buttinger continued to present a glowing picture of the Diem regime, while ignoring its many faults. Rather than provide its readers with an account of U.S. policy in Vietnam by a critical observer with expert insight, the editors of *Dissent* published a detailed defense of official actions by a participant in the very events being analyzed, a participant with intimate, albeit covert, ties to the intelligence community.[35]

When Diem toured the United States in 1957, having been met at the airport by President Eisenhower, Buttinger traveled along as personal adviser and speech writer. Yet, as President Diem became more isolated and arbitrary in his personal rule and as the urban opposition became more organized, Buttinger began to question his previous uncritical adulation of the South Vietnamese government. Nevertheless, he still supported Diem and resisted any move to publicly criticize his repressive policies. In November 1960, after a failed military coup by rebellious units of paratroop-

ers. Buttinger was relieved that Diem had not been toppled, "glad that his [Diem's] position remains as strong as ever." A month later he wrote to O'Daniel as a fellow supporter of Diem who shared the belief that they "should not try to know better than the President what he should do and [should] in no way interfere in the internal affairs of South Vietnam." Nevertheless, as partisans of the Diem regime, they had to "make our Vietnamese friends" understand "how strong the feeling has become that the regime ought to make some gestures to pacify the anti-Communist elements" in the opposition.[36]

This underlying ambivalence of public enthusiasm for Diem, coupled with private dismay at his personalistic and authoritarian rule, characterized the attitudes of those in the AFVN core immediately after the abortive coup of November 1960. Wesley Fishel reported to President Diem that he had been "in continuous contact" with leading supporters such as Senator Mike Mansfield and Edward Lansdale, as well as Cherne and Buttinger, and that this circle of friends remained personally loyal. Nevertheless, even these ardent defenders were becoming increasingly disturbed by widespread reports of pervasive corruption and the resulting "distinct lessening of popular confidence" in the Saigon regime.[37]

Despite these doubts, Fishel proudly informed Diem of a recent success in the continuing campaign to mold American public opinion. Although the initial stories concerning a failed coup attempted by Vietnamese paratoopers in Saigon had been printed by the *New York Times* "as they were received in New York" from reporters in the field, "Tillman Durdin, advised by Mr. [Harold] Oram, Mr. [Gilbert] Jonas, and myself, was able later to bring considerably more balance and objectivity into its stories and editorials." Durdin, a veteran journalist, had considerable influence in determining the *Times* slant on events in Vietnam during this period. As a reporter on the scene in 1954, Durdin's coverage of Diem's first months in power had convinced Lansdale and his CIA team that Durdin and his wife Peggy, also a journalist, were "warm friends of [the] S[aigon] M[ilitary] M[ission]." By 1960, Durdin had returned to New York for a post as an editorial writer and was soon after selected as a member of the *Times* editorial board.[38]

The *Times* coverage of the coup changed considerably over a brief few days. The first dispatch by Jacques Nevard, the paper's Saigon correspondent, reported the crisis without openly identifying with either faction. Once the rebel units had been surrounded and defeated, Nevard's dispatches were marked by fulsome praise for Diem and his autocratic regime. According to Nevard, the collapse of the coup reflected Diem's "political skill and his tenacity." Despite having been nearly overthrown by elements of his own military, Diem was "completely in control," his hold on power "stronger

than ever." Whether Nevard's shift in perspective reflected a desire to curry favor with the winning side or the impact of editorial guidance from Tillman Durdin can only be conjectured.[39]

For Buttinger, 1961 marked a turning point as he finally reversed his previous position and cut his ties to Diem. By then, Vietnamese opposition to Diem's dictatorial rule had become so widespread and deeply rooted that it had begun to undermine the unity of the ruling elite. High South Vietnamese officials resigned in disgust, and then joined the moderate opposition. Buttinger met with two of these officials in the summer of 1961 as they visited the United States in the hope of convincing American policymakers to remove Diem from office. As he learned in full detail of the corruption and nepotism that enveloped the Saigon government from those who had formerly served as Diem's trusted aides, Buttinger was forced to reconsider his position. He concluded that the thrust of U.S. policy had been one of "concentration on the purely military and technical," while ignoring the "authoritarian misdeeds" of the Saigon government. Diem and his clique of followers had undermined the morale of the military, especially the "dedicated young men in the Army." Buttinger remained hopeful, however, because there was a "more democratic spirit among the young officers of the Vietnamese army than among the political leadership."[40]

Buttinger had thus come full circle in his analysis of Vietnam. After his first trip to Saigon in 1954, he had enthusiastically endorsed Diem as the only anticommunist alternative to a military dictatorship. Having finally been convinced of Diem's record as a ruthless autocrat, Buttinger turned to the military as the last defense against a Communist victory. In a 1961 letter to General O'Daniel, Buttinger insisted that there could "be no question about defending" South Vietnam; indeed, the entire leadership of the AFVN continued to "subscribe to the need for intensified military efforts to combat Communist aggression." However, Diem's arbitrary and corrupt rule had been so "paralyzing in the military sphere" that it would be preferable to "have an open military dictatorship."[41]

Within the AFVN executive committee, disaffection with the Saigon regime deepened rapidly during the latter half of 1961. That fall the committee sent a private letter to Diem expressing the "Committee's fears and apprehensions concerning the present situation," and soon afterward the executive committee organized an intensive review of its past policies. The majority "decided that open criticism" would "be neither wise nor useful at this time," but public statements in praise of Diem were "now also out of the question." As the Kennedy administration quietly pressured Diem to loosen his harsh rule, Buttinger still had "hope that a change might be brought about in Saigon before it is too late."[42]

To resolve the tensions within the executive committee, the organization resolved to concentrate its efforts on a fund-raising campaign for Vietnamese relief projects, while downplaying its previous activities as the foremost lobby for the Diem regime. For Buttinger, who had become "fed up with the Diem regime," this compromise did not represent a sufficiently drastic break with past practice. In the summer of 1962, Buttinger resigned as chair of the executive committee, although he remained an AFVN member.[43]

As long as the Kennedy administration continued to back Diem, the committee remained deadlocked in dispute. Nonetheless, Diem was becoming an isolated and hated figure, with most Vietnamese united in their hatred of his regime. When mass demonstrations led by Buddhist monks erupted in May 1963, the Kennedy administration accepted the inevitable and initiated a search for an alternative leader.[44]

Buttinger had remained with the AFVN, but he persisted in pushing for an open break with Diem. In early October 1963 the executive committee finally agreed to publicly condemn Diem, a complete reversal of nearly a decade of obsequious praise. Buttinger's draft of a cover letter for an organizational statement argued that "only by a change in the Saigon regime's policies can the war be won," and concluded that the AFVN could "no longer back a regime which cannot win the support of its own people." Only General O'Daniel remained a Diem loyalist, resigning his position as chair in protest of the proposed statement.[45]

The draft was still under consideration when a military coup, undertaken with the tacit approval of the United States, overthrew Diem in early November 1963. Elated by the news, the AFVN officers quickly sent a cable, signed by Buttinger and Cherne, praising the victorious military dictatorship for providing "an opportunity for all the Vietnamese people to unite" and join "in the effort to insure freedom." With Diem deposed, Buttinger resumed his tenure as chair of the executive committee, once again acting as the leading spokesperson for the committee. He insisted that the new regime would be "more humane" and "better liked by the people, and therefore [would] be more efficient in the conduct of the war against the Communists."[46]

Polarized Opinions

The restoration of a tenuous unity within the ranks of the American Friends of Vietnam would prove short-lived. When President Johnson dramatically escalated the war in February 1965 by ordering the massive bombardment of North Vietnam, support for the war among liberals instantaneously evaporated, as even stalwart members of the establishment joined the swelling ranks of the antiwar movement. The core group of the AFVN immediately fissured in bitter debates over the course of the war.

With the active encouragement of the White House, a majority of the AFVN board of directors approved a statement lauding the aerial attacks on North Vietnam as "an appropriate response" to "the increased external Communist intervention in South Vietnam." The organization also called on the United States to intensify covert operations in the North, "including paramilitary actions."[47]

Totally disillusioned, Buttinger immediately resigned from the organization that he had founded and built, contending that "the war cannot be won with military means." Nevertheless, he still clung to the belief that the potential for a viable alternative to the Communist insurgents had once existed, "but this chance has been thrown away in ten years of reactionary policies and neglect of social reform."[48] Having determined that a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam represented the only feasible course of action, Buttinger became a vocal opponent of the Johnson administration's decision to sharply escalate the war. Yet he never came to terms with his own important role in buttressing the Diem regime throughout those first shaky months, nor did he ever admit to his close ties with the intelligence community during that first critical period.

Other progressives soon joined Buttinger in resigning from the American Friends of Vietnam in protest of its support for the bombing raids. In April 1965, Justice William Douglas resigned, insisting that his name no longer be used as a sponsor. His letter of resignation claimed that he had joined the AFVN "primarily to help in the educational projects of the University of Hué," but once the organization "entered the broader political field," he felt it necessary to withdraw. In fact, Douglas had been one of the first prominent Americans to extol Diem, so membership in the AFVN, with its ardent defense of the Saigon regime, had been perfectly consistent with his perspective on the Vietnamese conflict.[49]

Three years later, Douglas had changed his account of the resignation, explaining that he had withdrawn from the organization "after being convinced the CIA had fastened itself onto our vitals."[50] Douglas had not participated in the inner circle of the AFVN, and, in all likelihood, he had not been informed in detail of its close links with the intelligence community, links that had existed from the initial formation of the committee. Nevertheless, the AFVN boasted of its close working relationship with high U.S. government officials. As long as the progressives affiliated with the committee were in general agreement with official U.S. policy in Vietnam, these connections were viewed as an asset. With the rapid military escalation of 1965, the postwar consensus disintegrated into a whirlpool of bitter

disputes. Liberal opponents of the war now considered government pressure on the AFVN as unfair manipulation of a "private" citizens organization.

The Johnson White House understood the vital importance of winning public approval for the bombing raids. A key National Security Council aide, Chester Cooper, drew the assignment as liaison to the organization, working closely with Wesley Fishel, then serving as chair and chief spokesperson for the AFVN. Cooper, a veteran CIA officer, had risen to become assistant deputy director of intelligence, an influential post in the research and analysis wing of the Agency. His first involvement with Vietnam came when he attended the 1954 Geneva armistice conference as a national security aide. Soon after the Cuban missile crisis, Cooper was assigned as a liaison officer to the National Security Council under McGeorge Bundy. After the 1964 election, Cooper officially joined the NSC as a senior staff member, overseeing clandestine operations relating to Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam.[51]

In May 1965, as opposition to Johnson's decision to dramatically escalate the war mushroomed in strength, Cooper and Fishel agreed "to expand" the range of activities undertaken by the AFVN "as a non-governmental focal point of information and education on U.S. policy in Vietnam." A speakers bureau would send prowar speakers to campuses and civic organizations, while a newsletter, with a circulation of twenty thousand, would be issued under the auspices of the AFVN, with the help of propaganda experts from within the government.[52]

Although Cooper served as the coordinator for covert aid to the American Friends of Vietnam, authorization and supervision of the project extended to the top. Manipulating public opinion had the highest priority in the Johnson administration. From the initial decision in February 1965 to escalate the war by bombing North Vietnam, the president and his advisers knew that rising popular opposition could undermine U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Thus, although Cooper officially reported to McGeorge Bundy as a senior member of the NSC staff, Jack Valenti, Lyndon Johnson's closest personal adviser, directly supervised the AFVN project.

One program arising from the agreement by Cooper and Fishel involved recruiting American students for short stints of volunteer work in South Vietnamese villages. Groups from over a hundred campuses were organized for this purpose, with the AFVN coordinating the volunteers on a national level. A kick-off rally at Michigan State University, Fishel's home campus, featured as speakers Vice-President Hubert Humphrey and Carl Rowan, director of USIA, the government's open overseas propaganda agency. President Johnson personally approved the decision to send a high-level contingent to this public relations event, an indication of the importance attached to the AFVN by the administration.[53]

Of course, the scope of AFVN activities could not be greatly expanded without significantly increasing the organization's budget. Jack Valenti, with Johnson's personal approval, resolved this problem by approaching Sidney Weinberg for help in raising the needed funds. Over a period of several decades, Weinberg had come to epitomize those who exercise enormous power, while remaining virtually invisible to the public.[54]

Starting as a youngster polishing floors, Weinberg slowly rose to become senior partner at Goldman Sachs, a prestigious and powerful investment banking house. In 1956 Weinberg had coordinated the sale of $650 million in Ford Motor stock by the Ford Foundation, one of the largest equity sales in financial history. After half a century with Goldman Sachs, Weinberg was widely known as "Mr. Wall Street," a symbol of corporate wealth and authority. Yet Weinberg also served as a trusted liaison between the board room and the federal government. A year after endorsing Roosevelt in the 1932 presidential election, Weinberg helped to organize the Business Council, so that the views of big business could be represented to the new administration. Weinberg went on to serve as a personal confidant of five presidents, from Roosevelt through to Lyndon Johnson—influential but unseen. High officials in the Johnson regime, such as Secretary of the Treasury Henry Fowler, relied upon Weinberg's recommendation for their jobs.[55]

Thus, when Weinberg approached his corporate contacts for $55,000 in contributions for the American Friends of Vietnam, the money was quickly forthcoming. Weinberg himself gave $2,500, while soliciting donations of $10,000 from the Ford Motor Company and $5,000 from Proctor and Gamble, in addition to smaller amounts from several other corporate donors. Valenti happily reported to Lyndon Johnson that the " 'good' college professors" running the AFVN would soon launch "a counter-offensive moving on college campuses to combat the 'get out of Vietnam' beatniks," with the White House having successfully arranged to "have them financed through private sources."[56]

Cooper and the Johnson administration stood behind the AFVN, viewing it as an instrument for public information on Vietnam. Indeed, the government "spent a lot of time" aiding, advising, and helping to find funding for the organization. Yet Cooper understood the importance of being "careful to keep" the administration's "hand fairly hidden." After all, if the AFVN became "too clearly identified with the U.S. Government, its credibility will be badly affected."[57]

As Cooper feared, the AFVN would be discredited by public exposure of its hidden ties. *Ramparts* achieved a considerable notoriety during the 1960s as the source of several revealing investigations of CIA covert activ-

ity. An article by Robert Scheer and Warren Hinckle in the July 1965 issue highlighted the "Vietnam Lobby," particularly the American Friends of Vietnam. A more detailed version was issued shortly afterward as a pamphlet published by the Fund for the Republic, which had sponsored Scheer during his investigative research. Scheer's work disclosed the AFVN's close ties to the Diem regime through Harold Oram; it also sketched the links to the IRC, but left the CIA connections largely unexplored. Justice William Douglas was cited as an early enthusiast of Diem's, but he was not listed as one of the prominent progressives who had joined the national committee of the AFVN. Interestingly enough, Douglas also served as chair of the board of directors of the Fund for the Republic.[58]

Ramparts had a flare for publicity, and the article on the Vietnam lobby attracted considerable media attention. With the AFVN stripped of all legitimacy, its funding sources evaporated and it quietly disappeared. The critical importance of a new government-sponsored outlet for prowar propaganda soon became evident, for by 1967 opposition to the war had become a mass movement of militant resistance. This time the project was conceived and organized from within the White House. Joseph Buttinger had initiated the American Friends of Vietnam, but the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam was the brainchild of John Roche of the White House staff.

Roche did not fit easily within the inner circles of Johnson advisers. An intellectual, a Brandeis professor, and a long-time liberal activist, Roche was also a fervent hawk. As a young man, Roche had been a Socialist party militant, but World War II and service in the army brought him closer to mainstream politics. By 1948, Roche had abandoned his radical past to emerge as a committed liberal and a Cold Warrior as well. While serving as chair of the Americans for Democratic Action from 1962 to 1965, Roche split with the ADA leadership in his support for the Vietnam War. He was one of the few liberal intellectuals to endorse Johnson's decision to bomb North Vietnam, a decision that greatly facilitated his appointment as White House special consultant in the fall of 1966.[59]

Although Roche did not command the personal access to the president that Valenti enjoyed, he was entirely focused on the American war effort. In 1967 Roche advised President Johnson that he would be "starting a citizens committee in support of our Vietnam policy." Since the credibility of the committee required a facade of independence from the administration, Roche promised Johnson that he would "leave no traces" and that his activities would be "remarkably invisible."[60]

Roche moved on a far broader scale than had the IRC core group that had formed the American Friends of Vietnam in 1955. In one of his first

moves, Roche recruited Paul Douglas as chief spokesperson for the new committee. During his three terms in the Senate from 1948 to 1966, Douglas gained a reputation as one of the country's leading liberals by sponsoring landmark progressive legislation such as that establishing Medicare. Nonetheless, Douglas was a zealous defender of Cold War politics, and an enthusiastic advocate of the administration's decision to bomb North Vietnam while greatly increasing the number of ground troops stationed in the South.

Abbott Washburn soon joined the core planning group of the new committee. As a public relations expert, Washburn had served in the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, before returning to a lucrative position with General Mills during the postwar years. From 1950 to 1952, Washburn directed the Crusade for Freedom, a massive propaganda effort aimed at raising public donations for Radio Free Europe, thereby giving a certain spurious credibility to Free Europe's claims of being privately funded. During the first months of the Eisenhower administration, Washburn briefly served as chief aide to C. D. Jackson, White House special assistant for psychological warfare, before being shifted to a post as deputy director of the U.S. Information Agency. After Eisenhower left office, Washburn returned to the private sector, forming his own firm of media consultants.[61]

Not only did Washburn maintain excellent connections with top executives within the communications industry, but his extensive experience within the intelligence community had centered on covertly funded propaganda campaigns. With this background, Washburn furnished the new committee with astute advice and an overall strategic vision. In a September 1967 memorandum to Paul Douglas, Washburn urged the new venture to eschew "flag-waving, emotional patriotism, atrocity pictures," and the like for "rational persuasive" presentations. The new committee would become a sophisticated operation, targeted at reviving enthusiasm and support for the Vietnam War among liberals and moderates. President Johnson needed to regain the center, or risk a devastating collapse in public confidence. Propaganda geared toward hard-line Cold Warriors could not hope to achieve this goal.

Before the committee could project an effective public presence, it required a sizable budget to support the necesary staff and resources. From the start, Roche was instrumental in arranging for the needed funding. In an October 1967 memorandum to the president, Roche reported that the Internal Revenue Service had been urged to expedite approval for the committee's tax-deductible status. The IRS moved rapidly in response; by early November, a month after Roche's memorandum, the new organization

had been granted tax-deductible status, thereby making it far easier to solicit large contributions. To further encourage the wealthy few to give generously, Roche urged President Johnson to clear time on his social calendar for small, informal White House dinners with potential donors, since such invitations had "an amazing impact on the urge to contribute."[62]

A month later, after conferring with Douglas, Roche asked for Johnson's help in tapping Texas money for the citizens committee. "Who can raise $200,000 (tax deductible!) from Texas?" Needless to say, Texas oil and construction money had fueled Lyndon Johnson's unrelenting rise to power. A concerted drive to solicit large contributions from wealthy donors was quickly organized. John Hay Whitney, publisher of the *New York Herald Tribune* and heir to one of America's largest fortunes, personally donated $10,000, and pledged to raise $250,000 from his affluent friends. Whitney had excellent connections, including ties to the intelligence community stemming from his wartime experience with military intelligence and the Office of Strategic Services. Yet his task was made easier by the covert help being provided by those in the White House.[63]

This was a pattern repeated at other critical moments of the Cold War. When the administration pursued policies that were divisive even within the select circles of the foreign policy establishment, it utilized White House staff to organize and fund sensitive covert projects, bypassing the CIA as the operational agency. This facilitated direct presidential control, while also limiting the potential for leaks. For both Lyndon Johnson and Ronald Reagan, the parallel track had a compelling appeal. CIA operations aimed at manipulating domestic popular opinion were expressly forbidden, so Johnson used the White House staff instead. Military aid to the Nicaraguan contras had been the subject of an explicit congressional ban, so Reagan authorized the NSC staff and Oliver North to circumvent the ban.

In late October 1967, Paul Douglas officially launched the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam at a press conference that received extensive media coverage, including a front page article in the *New York Times*. Douglas insisted that "the idea was mine" and that the Committee operated in total independence from the White House. Yet its founding statement stridently defended the administration's policy in Vietnam. The Citizens Committee was "opposed to surrender, however camouflaged."[64]

The impact of the Citizens Committee depended on public perceptions of its credibility as an entirely independent, private citizens committee. To buttress this credibility, the organization recruited a large number of eminent personalities as endorsers, ranging from former president Harry Truman and his secretary of state, Dean Acheson, to leading trade unionists such as George Meany, AFL-CIO president, and corporate executives such

as John Hay Whitney and Joseph Wison, of Xerox. Former president Dwight Eisenhower not only signed the founding document, but he also publicized the committee through newspaper interviews. Paul Douglas insisted that Eisenhower had played "a very active part" in formulating a second public statement issued in January 1968, endorsing the bombing of North Vietnam and urging the administration to reject a temporary halt in the bombing, unless "promptly followed by Hanoi's cessation of sending men and matériel into the South."[65]

The Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam functioned on a qualitatively different scale from that previously undertaken by the American Friends of Vietnam: it generated a substantially larger budget and developed far greater access to the mass media. Furthermore, the Citizens Committee was not enmeshed in an intricate set of connections with the IRC, as had been the case with the AFVN. Nevertheless, key individuals in the Citizens Committee had also been active in the AFVN and the IRC. Leo Cherne signed the original call, along with one hundred forty other dignitaries, but the more significant connection was sustained through Mary Pillsbury Lord. At the Citizens Committee's first press conference in October 1967, Paul Douglas shared the platform with Omar Bradley, former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Lord.[66]

A socially prominent heiress (her grandfather had founded the Pillsbury flour mill and food conglomerate), Mary Lord enjoyed a long career as an officer in charitable organizations. During World War II, she chaired the women's activities section of the National War Fund, the quasi-governmental agency coordinating all private contributions in support of the war effort. Lord also played a leading role in Eisenhower's first presidential campaign and was rewarded with an appointment to succeed Eleanor Roosevelt as U.S. representative to the UN Human Rights Commission, a post she held through both of Eisenhower's terms in office. Upon returning to private life, Lord joined the International Rescue Committee board, succeeding William Casey as the Committee's president in 1971. Thus Lord served in a leading position within both the Citizens Committee and the IRC, providing an influential link between the two organizations.

Johnson's departure from the White House did not signal the end of the Citizens Committee as a vociferous defender of administration policy. A November 1969 statement by the committee, again featured on page one of the *New York Times*, criticized proposals linking a unilateral cease-fire to the speedy withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam. Instead, the committee held that such an abrupt departure of troops would "represent an American sellout, and would encourage the victors to try for one, two, or more Vietnams." Once having hastily withdrawn from Vietnam,

"America's word and leadership would be sharply devalued throughout the world."[67]

Yet the war was not going well for American forces on the battlefield, while at home huge demonstrations became increasingly militant, radicalizing the young and splitting the Democratic party. By early 1970, Paul Douglas had decided to withdraw from his post as spokesperson of the Citizens Committee. He would later claim that he had been deceived by the misrepresentations of the executive branch, and that he would not have endorsed President Johnson's decision to escalate the war had he known the true circumstances of the South Vietnamese quagmire. Given Douglas's long record as a staunch Cold Warrior and his central role in implementing a covert operation directed from the White House, his professions of innocence would appear to be self-serving and disingenuous.[68]

With Douglas's departure and Nixon's decision to limit the size of the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam, the role of the Citizens Committee began to shift. Instead of its previous emphasis on propaganda and public relations, the committee came to serve as an advisory body, enabling prominent and influential figures to counsel the administration through a crucial transition period.

Douglas was replaced by Edmund Gullion, a career diplomat who had served in the U.S. embassy in Saigon during the early 1950s. While in Saigon, Gullion had written internal State Department memoranda correctly predicting the imminent demise of French colonial rule in Indochina, as well as the speedy collapse of Emperor Bao Dai's regime in Vietnam. Gullion had been quickly removed from his position in the field and assigned to a series of desk jobs until John F. Kennedy, upon his election as president, rescued his career by naming him ambassador to the Congo, one of the key Cold War hot spots of that time.[69]

Even after retiring from the Foreign Service in the fall of 1964 to be dean of the Fletcher School of Diplomacy at Tufts University, Gullion remained an influential presence behind the scenes. Under Secretary of State George Ball chose him for a highly sensitive and top-secret mission in the summer of 1965. Traveling as a tourist and a private citizen, Gullion met with the North Vietnamese representative in Paris to explore the potential for open negotiations leading to the formal conclusion of hostilities. When differences between the two sides proved insurmountable, the informal discussions were quickly terminated.[70]

Gullion was also a vocal proponent of the war, having served as vice-chair of the American Friends of Vietnam in 1966, and then as a founding member of the Citizens Committee in 1967. As Paul Douglas abandoned his previous enthusiastic support for the war, Gullion took over as the focal

point for activity within the Citizens Committee. In the spring of 1970, Gullion led a small group of notables, including Lord, on two inspection trips to South Vietnam to evaluate Richard Nixon's decision to slowly reduce the number of ground troops in combat positions. Upon their return, the group met with President Nixon to report that future troop reductions should be "prudent and flexible," with the pace of withdrawal dependent on the increasing ability of South Vietnamese forces to contain the Communist insurgency.[71] As Nixon tried to move Vietnam out of the limelight of public discussion, the publicity campaign of the Citizens Committee lost its direction and the committee drifted from public view.

The International Rescue Committee was a very different organization when the Vietnam War ended from what it had been two decades earlier when the United States first decided to intervene. In 1954 the Committee was emerging from a crisis of confidence, searching in vain for reliable sources of funding. By 1975, the IRC was a global operation with millions of dollars in open government contracts. Yet throughout this period the Committee continued to maintain its close, covert links to the intelligence community.